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FAMILY BILINGUALISM: AN ENGLISH-SPANISH CASE STUDY IN MADRID (SPAIN)

BILINGÜISMO FAMILIAR: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO INGLÉS-ESPAÑOL EN MADRID (ESPAÑA)

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This article is a contribution to the study of family bilingualism in the form of a case study, using some ethnographic techniques. It offers the example of a mixed-language couple raising their children bilingually in English and Spanish in Madrid (Spain) by choice, not by need. The author describes and analyses this process and the consequences to date in her own family by using theoretical and empirical knowledge acquired through research on the subject along with her notes on her children's bilingual development. Thus, both as a parent and a linguist, the author hopes to provide a comprehensive and authentic example of a bilingual family which could serve to help other researchers and parents to understand the practice of raising bilingual children. Different aspects are included, such as the beliefs, decisions, achievements, regrets and hopes experienced by her family as well as the results achieved so far.

Another aim is to demonstrate the advantages of drawing on knowledge from both the academic and the non-academic world, how both sides complement each other and should therefore share information for the benefit of all so that it proves useful for real life. This case study also highlights the importance of how learning about the subject can be beneficial to succeed in the process of bringing up children bilingually. As experienced by the author's own family, misconceptions about bilingualism and a lack of reliable information can influence the development of the children's bilingualism as parents might not be able to make informed decisions during the process.

***Keywords**: Case study, English-Spanish family bilingualism, bilingual family language policy, bilingual family language strategies, harmonious bilingual development*

Este artículo es una contribución al estudio del bilingüismo familiar en forma de estudio de caso, utilizando técnicas etnográficas. Ofrece el ejemplo de una pareja mixta que cría a sus hijos de forma bilingüe en inglés y español en Madrid (España) por elección, no por necesidad. La autora describe y analiza este proceso y las consecuencias en su propia familia hasta la fecha, usando conocimientos teóricos y empíricos adquiridos durante la investigación del tema, junto a sus notas sobre el desarrollo bilingüe de sus hijas. De esta manera, como madre, así como lingüista, la autora espera proporcionar un ejemplo amplio y auténtico de una familia bilingüe que podría servir para ayudar a que otros investigadores y padres entiendan la práctica de la crianza bilingüe. Se incluyen diferentes aspectos, como las creencias, decisiones, logros, arrepentimientos y deseos experimentados por su familia, así como los resultados conseguidos hasta ahora.

Otro objetivo es demostrar las ventajas de utilizar el conocimiento proveniente tanto del mundo académico como del no académico, cómo ambas partes se complementan y, por consiguiente, deberían compartir información para beneficio de todos, para que sea útil en la vida real. Este estudio de caso también subraya la importancia de cómo aprender sobre el tema puede ser beneficioso para tener éxito en el proceso de criar niños bilingües. Por la experiencia de la propia familia de la autora, las ideas equivocadas sobre el bilingüismo y una falta de información fiable pueden influir en el desarrollo del bilingüismo de los niños, ya que puede que los

padres no sean capaces de tomar decisiones informadas durante el proceso.

Palabras clave: *Estudio de caso, bilingüismo familiar inglés-español, política lingüística de familias bilingües, estrategias lingüísticas de familias bilingües, desarrollo bilingüe armonioso*

1. Introduction

During my research on the family language policy (FLP) of bilingual families *by choice*, as opposed to *by need,* I found out that it is almost impossible to find a general method that works in every case. Each family is unique and has different circumstances, some of which might change with time. Furthermore, within every family plan there are multiple combinations of the various types of strategies parents can choose from. For that reason, since neither the process nor the results are usually the same for every family, I decided to carry out a case study on a Spanish-English speaking family living in Madrid: My own.The main aim is to offer an example of a detailed account of the process of bringing up bilingual children in which different aspects are described, including the beliefs, decisions, achievements, regrets and hopes experienced by my family as well as the results achieved so far. Providing this example could prove useful to both researchers and parents looking for more practical data on the subject.

In fact, the secondary aim of this article is to show, thanks to my multiple points of view, the benefits of drawing knowledge from both the academic and non-academic sides of the sub-field of family bilingualism to study the subject. Throughout my investigation, I have observed that the most popular, non-academic information online tends to lack research findings which could be very advantageous for bilingual families. On the other hand, academic literature is not always comprehensible for the general public, with the exception of, for instance, Grosjean and Pavlenko's blogs *Life as a bilingual* and *Life as a Bilingual II*[1] and initiatives such as *the Cambridge Bilingualism Network*[2] and *Bilingualism Matters*[3]. Moreover, research on the subject does not seem to always consider the more emotional, human aspects of raising bilingual children, which play a key part (Noguchi, 1996; Pavlenko, 2004; Koven, 2007; Grosjean, 2009;

De Houwer, 2013). Therefore, I believe that both sides could combine their knowledge to offer a more comprehensive view of the process of raising bilingual children.

The final aim is to emphasize the importance of learning about family bilingualism for parents raising their children in two languages, which can be beneficial to succeeding. As experienced by my own family, misconceptions about bilingualism and a lack of reliable information can influence the development of the children's bilingualism as parents might not be able to make informed decisions for their FLP during the process.

2. Methodology

As a research method, I opted for an ethnographic approach to carry out this case study, as it is a qualitative method that allowed me to use the data I had been collecting on my children's bilingual upbringing for the past 11.6 years and combine it with findings from the academic literature on family bilingualism to present a detailed portrait of my bilingual family. Another reason why I chose this methodology is my personal involvement in this study, as a participant observer. An ethnographic approach permitted me to include all my perspectives on the topic as a mother (participant), a linguist (expert) and a researcher (observer) to construct an in-depth analysis of my family's experience with bilingualism.

The data was collected by using some of the most common ethnographic methods: Notes, observations, reflections and interviews. These methods allowed me to record what has happened in my bilingual family in the most natural way possible. Thus, I have been observing my children's bilingual development since they were born and reflecting on the process in writing, mostly my observations and impressions: Milestones, surprising changes, comments, attitudes, preferences and progress. My husband has also contributed, in writing, his own perception of the children's progress, which helped me confirm my own perceptions.

I have also been noting down representative examples of their linguistic production in both languages, especially in English, their weaker language. Since my children are unaware of these notes, both out of respect and discretion, to not disturb the natural process, subtle interviewing of my

children regarding their language preferences and bilingual identity was carried out and is also included (see 5.).

I am conscious of the fact that using a descriptive approach to depict my family by creating a personal narrative (see 3. for a detailed description of the process of designing our family language policy) is inevitably selective. Thus, it might not be considered as rigorously scientific as using other methodologies, yet it seemed fit for the purpose of the study since, ultimately, the main characteristic of the ethnographic method is personalisation.

Indeed, I am aware that my personal implications in this topic can affect the objectivity of my analysis and thus, I have tried to remain as neutral as possible. The data I have compiled comprises both correct and incorrect examples of linguistic production. Furthermore, in constructing my personal narrative I have included both right and wrong decisions taken regarding our family language policy. However, I believe that subjectivity plays an important part in the process a bilingual family undergoes, as both linguistic and emotional aspects are intrinsically entwined and must be considered together. Therefore, I regard my personal engagement as a positive factor as it allows me to be in a privileged position and connect my understandings on my family's process to the literature on the subject to offer a comprehensive picture of a bilingual family. As stated by Maxwell (1996:28): "Separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypotheses and validity checks". In fact, many authors on bilingualism are either bilingual themselves and/or have a bilingual family of their own, from Ronjat (1913) and Leopold (1939-1949) to Saunders (1982, 1988), Grosjean (2010) and Barron-Hauwaert (2004, 2011), amongst many others.

3. Our Family Language Policy

3.1. Family Profile

My husband is English, and I am Spanish. We met in England but have been living in Madrid for the last 20 years. We are both bilingual in English and Spanish and have always communicated in English. Our two daughters, D1 and D2 (11;6 and 9) have been raised bilingually by choice at home in

English and Spanish, since birth, mostly so they can communicate with our families but also as an asset for their future. They attend a bilingual (English-Spanish) primary school. We live in a bilingual, bicultural household, yet most of our resources are in English. We are part of a large number of English-Spanish bilingual families living in Madrid as shown in my previous research (Ruiz Martín, 2017) where I studied 110 families of this kind with children aged 0-18.

3.2. Initial Misconceptions and Preliminary Research on Bilingualism

Before our children were born and I researched bilingualism, we were not aware of the need to read about it in order to make important decisions for our family language policy as we thought our children would automatically become perfectly balanced bilinguals without us having to do much about it and would not need to take English classes at school. We also believed we should never force our children to speak their minority language, as that might put them off forever and we were expected to follow One Person One Language (OPOL- each parent uses their own language with the children) by everybody around us, although I was not convinced. Therefore, out of personal interest, I read a book about family bilingualism (Harding-Esch & Riley, 2003) and found out there are other parental language strategies to choose from to raise children bilingually. I also read some scientific articles on the Internet about the advantages of being bilingual, yet, regrettably, I did not do any further research, especially after D1 was born, as I was a busy first-time, full-time working mother and lacked the energy or the time. Although research can be done in advance, many questions arise during the process which might be difficult to anticipate. It might also be necessary for parents to have some background knowledge on the subject to be able to fully comprehend some of the more academic information.

3.3. Language Strategies

Researching the subject before their child is born, as well as finding a suitable strategy is common practice amongst parents in bilingual families (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004). In our case, we chose *Minority Language at Home* (ml@h), so we both used English with the children, who learnt

Spanish outside the home. This strategy, recommended by experts such as Grosjean (2009), was ideal for us to establish English as the family language, since I was the main carer, felt confident in my English and had to expose her to as much input as possible (Pearson, Fernandez, Lewedeg & Oller, 1997; Thordardottir, 2011). Speaking to D1 in English felt quite natural as I have always spoken to my husband in English, yet people found it strange, which concerned me, as I did not know of any other Spanish-speaking mothers who spoke to their children in English at the time. Then, as D1 went through the first stages of the acquisition of her two languages which, I found out during my later research, involve the normal mixing of the languages (Genesee, 2001), we worried about her communicating at the nursery at 2;2, especially because English was dominant. Therefore, before D1 joined school at age 3;2, we changed our strategy to what I later found out to be, *the Mixed System 1 strategy* (MS1), consisting in one parent speaking the minority language and the other parent speaking both the majority and the minority language to the children. Using ml@h proved very beneficial later on and had we carried on with it, the girls' Spanish would have improved at school, as it indeed happened, yet we lacked that information at the time. Their English, though, became weaker as they received less input, especially during the week, when the influence of Spanish is greater. Weekends, though, were always a chance to do fun activities in English.

However, I could not imagine not speaking to my children in my mother tongue as they grew older, a common issue for bilingual parents (Pavlenko, 2004). MS1 allowed me to be "myself" more, as bilinguals perceive themselves differently in their two languages (Koven, 2007; Pavlenko, 2006). I also felt more respectful using Spanish with my daughters in front of other Spanish speakers and so did they, as they have always made sure their grandparents understand what we say. The emotional aspects involved in following parental language strategies, which we prioritise over successful bilingualism, I observed, are not always present in the literature of the field yet are key in the process.

Although not sure about the change of strategy, later research confirmed that "In the early years they [the parents] might try out two or three different strategies depending on how it is working out" (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004:41). Our children's response to MS1 was to use mostly Spanish with each other and us, even when we used mostly English with

them. Thus, for many years, we had mostly dilingual conversations (Saville-Troike, 1987), we addressed them in English and they replied in Spanish, such as:

> M/F: "Girls, come here, please!"
> D1/D2: "¡*Un momento*! (Just a moment!)

In this way, we all communicated perfectly well at home, whereas in England we have always communicated in English, place being our main domain of use (Hoffmann, 1991).

Surprisingly, after a visit in England, both girls (10; 6 & 8) started to address their father in English more often of their own accord and recently, they even replied to me in English when I spoke to them in Spanish for the first time ever (11& 8;7). Children make their own choices regarding the home language (Piller, 2001), so we can only attribute this change to the continuous input they have received in the minority language, both at home and in England, and especially the chance to produce it. Doubtless, their motivation to communicate with friends and family in England has always been the force behind their efforts to improve their English. Finally, English has become the family language, as we planned from the beginning.

Regarding our daughters' view of their parents' use of languages, they have both always accepted my bilingualism as normal and have never asked me to use a different language from the one I am using with them at the time. However, they do not like their father to use Spanish with them as "he does not sound like himself in Spanish" (D1,10;3). We are aware that, as a family, we have created our language choice patterns which have an effect on all of us and the relationships between us (Hua, 2008) and are happy, so far, with our choice.

3.4. Discourse Strategies

As stated above (3.2.), we had heard how counterproductive forcing children to speak a language could be and we both felt it was wrong to either force our child and/or deceive her and pretend we could not understand her Spanish or speak it ourselves. Therefore, we missed the chance to create a need in our oldest daughter to only speak in English at

home, at least with her father, in her early years (0-3). In sum, we were unaware of the different discourse strategies which complement language strategies (Lanza, 1997). However, we had used some of them subconsciously, mostly the *move on strategy*, i.e. using English regardless of which language they chose to use with us, thus showing our daughters that we accepted their choice of language pattern as communication happened anyway. Had we found out about the positive effect of the most coercive strategies (Ruiz González, 2003), we might have used them from the beginning. On the other hand, if my husband had been the children's main carer, the English only pattern might have been created naturally as motivation from the minority language parent is key (Döpke, 1992). Successful changes of bilingual to monolingual discourse strategies only seem to work with young children (Taeschner, 1983; Kasuya, 1998; Juan-Garau & Pérez-Vidal, 2001). Nevertheless, to prompt them to switch to English, at ages 5 and 3 we started using the *expressed guess strategy* (repeating in English what they say in Spanish with a complete question) and the *minimal grasp strategy* (pretending not to understand using "Pardon?" or "Say it again?"), which usually worked. I believe the use of these strategies might have contributed to the change in our daughters' interaction with us at home. By contrast, we have never had to use any of these strategies when with other English-speaking people, in England or in Spain, even if they know they can speak Spanish too.

3.5. Facilitating Techniques

To provide input in the minority language, we have followed our intuition and other bilingual families' experiences and have always provided books, games, music, films and series in English. A very practical book on bilingualism (Beck, 2016) and a very active website, *Bilingual Monkeys* (http://bilingualmonkeys.com), gave me ideas for activities to use English at home, such as "Family dinners", which mostly work ("Why are we talking in Spanish?", D1 (10;7) asked us once). We were also reassured that reading aloud to our children, which we have always done, would be very positive in the long term. We can see how, for instance, the Harry Potter series has had a great impact on their English. It even prompted them to speak in English with each other while "playing Harry Potter", to my amazement: D1 (9;5): "Obviously, Mum, we can't do it in Spanish, can we?", although their negotiating used to be in Spanish: D1 (9;5): "*Y tú*

dices (and you say) 'Harry come here' *"*. Our children have certainly learnt to appreciate resources originally created in English and reject the translated versions, thinking, for example, that *Star Wars* was "funny" in Spanish (D2, 6;3). Thanks to all the resources they have we have observed their English vocabulary expand. In fact, whenever they come up with an expression that surprises us, we always ask: "Where did you get that from?". "Well," D2 told me once (6;7), "From books and films", and she is probably right.

To give them the opportunity to practice their English, we attended English-speaking playgroups and met up with bilingual families, becoming part of a network and exchange support during the beginning of the process. At home, any fun activities together, such as cooking or playing games, always triggers the girls' use of English. We also communicate with relatives and friends via skype and visit England regularly, which has been especially effective, resulting in noticeable boosts in their minority language during and after every visit (see section 4 below). Thus, we increased our summer holiday time three years ago (at 8 and 6) to show them different parts of England and contribute to their biculturalism. We also try to expose them to cultural elements and events in both countries.

Attending a Spanish-English bilingual school since the age of 3 seems to be helping our daughters more in their acquisition of English than in Spanish, most subjects being in English, although their teachers are non-native speakers of English. To fit in with their classmates, both our children have developed a special "school English" which differs greatly from their real English, especially regarding their accent and intonation. To not stand out, they sometimes refuse to produce as much English as their teachers would like them to, yet they are always happy to help their classmates: D1 (9;4): "The teacher gave us some dictionaries, but my group didn't need one because I was the dictionary!".

4. The Children's Bilingual Development

Using the notes I have been taking since our children were born, the aim is to present observations and examples of their bilingual development to illustrate the consequences of our decisions and changes in our family language policy.

Abbreviations used: M (Mother); F (Father); D1 (the older daughter); D2 (the younger daughter).

From 0-2, D1 received input in English from both her parents and Spanish from her grandparents, therefore she understood both languages but produced more English. At age 2;2 she joined nursery school and her Spanish gradually overcame her English. From 2;8 she started to produce whole sentences in both languages: "Mummy, sit down!", "*Mami, quiero jugar con* éste" (Mummy, I want to play with this one). She also went through the period of mixing both languages, until 3;4, including translating (2;10): "*Mira*, moon. *La luna*. Star. *Estrellita*." (Look; The moon; Little star). At first, she would mix with everyone regardless of their mother tongue as "Under three-year-olds are cognitively not able to consider whether the person they are talking to understands everything or whether they are using the 'right' language." (Barron-Hauwaert (2004: 11): "*No tiene* eyes" (It doesn't have); "*Quiero* something to eat" (I want), "*pequeñito avión*" (small plane but *avión pequeñito* in Spanish).

Although her mixing was confusing for her teacher at the nursery, she was very expressive, which helped her communicate. Then, she became aware of her parents' bilingualism and started having dilingual conversations with us from 2;5, without having to use English. Yet, at 2;9, she knew to use "more" (*más*) with us and "*más*" with others when asking for things. She also relied on me understanding everything, which did not always happen: (3) "*Quiero* jus*"* (I want *jus*, repeated twice as I did not understand), then "¡*Quiero zumo!*" (I want juice!). She would code-switch to get her father's attention too:

> D1 (3;10): "*Papi, quiero galletas*." (Daddy, I want some biscuits)
> F: "Nope."
> D1: "Daddy, can I have a biscuit?"

While at nursery (2;2-2;11), her Spanish improved gradually, yet she continued to produce a balance of both languages. However, from 3, her Spanish developed faster than her English during her first year at school, where she refused to speak in English with her bilingual teacher. At this age she was able to interpret for her Spanish grandma, a card in English (3;1) and from her English TV programme (3;5): "Backpack *dice que es navidad*." (Backpack says it's Christmas). She also code-switched between me and her sister:

D1 (3;6, talking to me): "I've got animals."
D1, to D2: "*Son mis animales*." (They are my animals)

With her sister, she used both languages, sometimes even in the same interaction (3;7, playing hide and seek): "Where are you? *Ahora tú*" (Your turn now).

At 3;5, for the first time, after explaining to her that if she wanted something from her grandparents, she had to use English while in England, her English improved noticeably, especially afterwards, with basic short sentences for interaction ("I don't want it"), even to herself ("What's this? It's an apple"). These incremental steps in her usage have happened every time we have been to England since then.

From 3;6, my notes focused mostly on her English, which she used mainly at weekends, when we were all together. Her two languages started interfering: "*Como así*", literal translation of "Like this" ("así" in Spanish); "*says Mummy yes*", ("Mummy says yes" using the Spanish grammatical structure). She also started imitating us by "reading" stories in English to D2 (3;8) and the way her English cousins talked.

Her English kept improving thanks to visits to England (3;9, 4;1) and at 4;4 she was able to use mostly English over there, although sometimes she felt she could not communicate very well and went quiet. However, she would only talk to me in Spanish when we were on our own, as she has always been very respectful towards other people regarding her bilingualism.

At home she (4;5) would use English to get my attention by code-switching: "¿A *dónde vamos, Mamá?*" ("Where are we going, Mummy?" - repeated 3 times) then "Where are we going, Mummy?". At that time, when we still used to have *dilingual* conversations, she was conscious of everyone's choice of languages at home: "*Habláis en inglés. Y yo en español*." ("You speak in English. And I in Spanish."). However, I started to notice that there were words she only knew in English: "*Es un poco* tight" (It's a bit), "*No es muy* comfortable." (It's not very). A lot of her vocabulary came from TV cartoons, stories and songs, mostly short sentences for interaction ("let's have a look", "this is very nice", "here I come") which she would sometimes use with her sister. At 4;8, after a visit in England, she started to explain herself better.

It took D1 a while to learn the names of her different languages, a common feature amongst young bilingual children (Hardin-Esch and Riley, 2003):

> D1 (4;10, while being read a story, pointing at a picture): "¿*Qué es* ésto*?*" (What's this?)
> M: "A church."
> D1: "¿Y eso cómo se dice en como yo hablo?" (And how do you say that in how I speak?)

At 4;11, she explained to her Spanish grandmother that the TV cartoon character in English "*habla como mi madre y mi padre*" (speaks like my mother and father). She went through a phase around this age when she did not speak in English to us at home even though or possibly because we had asked her to do it to help her sister learn. For instance, she was "reading" an English book to her sister and said "*naranja*" (orange). When I said, "but it's an English story so it's *orange*", she replied "*Pero eso cuando estoy con Nanny and Grandad*" (But that it's only when I'm with…). For her, English was only associated with being in England or with English speakers who could not speak any Spanish, unlike her parents, which is probably one of the reasons why she did not feel the need to speak to us in English for many years.

At 5 she was not confident enough to speak in English for long periods whilst in Spain because "*no tengo muchas* words" (I don't have many). However, she stopped mixing her languages and improved her English very noticeably that summer in England when she did not stop talking, with longer and more complex sentences: "I'd better go outside"; "I used to watch this when I was little"; "I like this one, actually." Yet she was not fully comprehensible, as she still struggled with some sounds in Spanish, except when she copied her cousins, when she sounded really English. Later on (5;8), after another visit, she became more comprehensible and produced longer explanations and requests ("Please can you move all these stories for me to sit down?"), although she sometimes needed some words: "What's *chinchar*?" (tease).

At 5;10 she started to read and write in Spanish and a little bit in English, realising their differences in spelling and pronunciation. She very quickly got quite proficient in both skills in her two languages (6;1),

reading being one of her strengths. At 6 she took another step forward, introducing words for interaction such as "actually", "otherwise", etc. Then, back home, she started talking in English to her father more often, even to her sister while they were playing, also producing some examples of cross-linguistic influence from English for a while ("*Ya vengo"*, a literal translation of "I'm coming" instead of "*Ya voy*", "I'm going" in Spanish; "*mi favorita comida*" ("my favourite food" but "*mi comida favorita*" in Spanish).

At 6;4 she could code-switch perfectly between both her sets of grandparents while having a meal together, enjoyed making up songs, both in English and in Spanish and started picking up some colloquial English from her cousins ("goodie!", "easy-peasy"). At 6;5 the English books at school were too easy for her since she was now reading books for English-speaking children her age or above. At 6;9 she got another boost and her English got better and faster. She spoke in English to her sister in England, even when on their own, for a while, before changing to Spanish. At 6;10, however, she was still puzzled about bilingualism: "¿Papá, por qué hablas en español con los otros padres, los abuelos y los tíos?" (Dad, why do you speak in Spanish with the other parents, our grandparents and our uncle and aunt?).

From 7 to 8 her English improved steadily, especially thanks to our visits in England and she started to manage more complex productions ("Can you possibly wait for me, please?", "You're wasting your time doing that.") while having some problems with indirect language due to the cross-linguistic influence of the Spanish structure: "I know how *is that*" (just like D2 at the same age). Back at home, D1 started to speak in English at dinner time without any prompting, sometimes followed by D2.

From 8 onwards, I stopped noting down so much surprising language as she reached a good level of English and was not progressing at the same rate as before. Even so, she made a big leap after a longer holiday in England at 9, producing more complex language: "It's just that I don't want to hurt her feelings", "I told her many times!", "we had such a laugh!", "I'm desperate to come out" (of the car), "It's awfully cold!". Yet she still experienced some temporary cross-linguistic influence from Spanish ("I'm *more hungry*"). The same thing has happened from 10 as she sometimes adds more elaborate language to her English: "We might as well watch it

here" (10;1), "That's what I call a coincidence!" (10; 6), "I'm lost for words", "Something caught my eye" (10;7). On the other hand, she sometimes code-switches (10;6), but only at home, where she knows she is understood: "*Lo has* sharpened?" (Have you sharpened it?). At the moment (11;6), she still has some cross-linguistic influence from English in her Spanish which tend to disappear with time: "*Imagínate teniendo 7 hijos*!" (from "Imagine having 7 children" instead of "*Imagínate tener*") and "*Mayoría de la gente"* (from "Most people" instead of "*La mayoría de la gente*").

From 0-2, D2 also received mostly input in English from her parents and sister and some Spanish from D1 and her grandparents, so she produced both English and Spanish roughly in the same percentage. From 2, she spoke mostly in English, coinciding with a visit to England, which always produce a noticeable improvement. She mixed languages between 2;3 and 3;2, especially between 2;3-2;6.: (2;3) "I've got *pan*" (bread); "*Yo* do it" (I); (2;4) "Take/read/have/leave ésto" (this); (2;5) "¡*Ahí* sit *yo*!" ("I sit there!"), "¿*Quieres* watch TV?" (Do you want to); (2;6) "¿*Hay queso* at home?" (Is there cheese). She used English words with her Spanish grandparents: (2;4) "And you? /sorry/ thank you." She always chose the easiest forms: "*Toma*" (instead of "here you are") or "Me too" (instead of "*yo también*"). Her first whole sentences in both languages were "Everybody is here!" and "*Quiero salir*" (I want to go out).

At 2;5 her English was still stronger as she spent more time at home with me than D1 and interacted well with English-speaking children her age. Yet, at 2;6 she started having dilingual conversations with us, which became the norm:

M: "Why are you taking your dress off?"
D2: "*Porque hace calor*." (Because it's hot).

She also produced the same examples of cross-linguistic influence as her sister by imitation: (2;6) "*Ya vengo.*" (a literal translation of "I'm coming" instead of "*Ya voy*", "I'm going" in Spanish), "*Lavo mis manos.*" (from English "I wash my hands" but "*Me lavo las manos*" in Spanish).

At 2;7, spending time amongst Spanish speakers, her Spanish developed so greatly that she even spoke some Spanish in England. She

still mixed at 2;8: "*Hay* cars." (There are), "*Quiero* sit down." (I want to). When she started school at 2;9, her Spanish was stronger, and became dominant during her first year there. She also went through the phase of saying the same in both languages: (2;11) "*Mami, te quiero un montón.* I love you a lot a lot a lot." (Mummy, I love you a lot).

More mixing came after a visit in England (3;1): "*Tenemos que ir a una* shop *en coche porque está muy* far away" (We have to go to a shop by car because it's very far away). D2, like D1, was not sure which language was which:

> M: "Did you watch Peppa Pig in English or in Spanish at school?"
> D2: "Peppa Pig*? En normal*." ("The normal way", i.e., in English)

Finally, at 3;7, she started to use English a lot more, especially a visit in England and became more interactive around the age of 4, when she started differentiating between her languages and associating them with different people. She began to use English with her father while doing activities together, on their own, playing, shopping or cooking. She also started to ask the meaning of new words that come up in books, which she still does: "¿*Qué significa* healthy*?*" (What does healthy mean?). Furthermore, she became conscious of the importance of learning English, mainly to speak it in England, not at home:

> D1 (6;9): "¿Pero por qué repites lo que dice Diego en la tele?" (But why are you repeating what Diego says on TV? - a TV cartoon character talking in English).
> D2 (4;4): "*Porque si no, no podemos hablar en inglés en Inglaterra*." (Because otherwise we won't be able to speak in English in England.).
> D1: "*Pues yo ya me sé muchas palabras*." (I know a lot of words already).

Logically, D1 was more confident in her ability in English at the time than D2, who was still a bit limited, although after a visit to England her English had flourished, she started to speak to her sister in English in England and to produce longer and more complex sentences: D2 (4;4): "Look at what *I* can do!". Yet, she still experienced some temporary grammatical cross-linguistic influence, which showed she was Spanish-dominant: "The most funny in the world" (grammatically closer to "*el más divertido del mundo*" than "the funniest"), "look (at) me" (*mírame*), "I

don't want (to)" (*no quiero*). She also had some gaps in her vocabulary: "*Papá me estaba dando* a shoulder ride*"* (Dad was giving me a shoulder ride. *Papá me estaba llevando a hombros*). However, she still found speaking in English all the time while in England a bit tiring and frustrating at that age (4;8), although she was very respectful about it, with her cousins, L and M, for example: "*Ya podemos hablar en español, ¿no? No están L y M*." (We can talk in Spanish now, can't we? L and M aren't here.). Surprisingly, when we came back from England, she felt like carrying on using English, being respectful of her Spanish grandparents too, just like her sister:

> D2 (4;8): "*Ahora que ya no están los abuelos ya podemos hablar en inglés*."
> (Now that our grandparents aren't here we can talk in English)
> M: "Good idea! Would you like to?"
> D2: "Yesss!"

At 5;5 she started feeling comfortable with speaking in English in England for the first time as she did not complain about it and when we came back home she said she had forgotten her Spanish because she had spoken in English so much! Yet at 5;8 we wondered if D1 might have been delaying her acquisition of English, because being the older sister, closer to her English relatives, more outgoing and knowing more English, she did not let her speak much. Finally, at 6;8, her English experienced the biggest boost after a longer holiday in England. She stopped letting D1 speak for her as she felt much more confident. We noticed very natural expressions she probably learnt from her older cousin: "'Cos I wanted another biscuit, that's why", "I'm really fast at falling asleep, you know", "That's allergic to milk, that is". However, back home, she was aware that we use English, but not her: (talking to me about food) "*Se va a quedar 'frío como una piedra', como decís vosotros*, 'stone cold'" (It's going to get cold as a stone, as you say).

From about 7 onwards, D2 had already reached a good level of spoken English and could read well too, with the occasional mixing (7;10): "*Iba por el* pavement." (I was walking on the). Nevertheless, around 7;3, D2, of a rebellious character, still ignored our hints to switch to English when we were all together on our own. However, at 7;9 her English went through yet another turning point. She was complimented on her accent and after a couple of weeks in England we noticed a great amount of new

expressions she had never used before, from her cousin ("I bet", "so cool", "love it", "I'm not very keen on that") and from us too:

D2 (7;9): "Good job I did that."
M: "That's a good expression!"
D2: "You say that."

She spoke so much in English while over there that when she spoke with her Spanish grandmother on the phone, she struggled a bit with her Spanish! She reached a comfortable level as I stopped writing down so many surprising expressions since then, except: "Speaking of tablets…" (8), "I hope you like this card as much as I do" (8;3). She also still asks for the meaning of certain words (8;1: "How do you say flags in Spanish?") and has a fossilized mistake she still does not seem to be aware of which, in fact, became the first and only time she has ever tried to correct me:

M: "What for?"
D2 (7;1): "For what".
M: "No, what for".

5. The Children's Command of their Two Languages

The simultaneous acquisition of two languages means that bilingual children have two native languages with different levels of proficiency according to their degree of contact with each one of them (Grosjean, 2010). Thus, as shown above, we have always been providing our children with continuous input and opportunities to practice in both their languages to help them develop their bilingualism in the most balanced way possible. Yet, at the moment, as a result of our family language policy, our daughters' bilingualism (11;6 and 9) is not as balanced as it could be. Although they are both active bilinguals, Spanish is clearly their dominant language and English is their weaker language. They both have a native speaker's command of Spanish and a good command of English, but not the equivalent to that of a native speaker of their ages. In English, I feel they have now reached an acceptable point in their communicative competence as I notice fewer surprising structures in their production, although they both continue to improve steadily. In Spanish, however, they lack the equivalent vocabulary of most of the academic content they are learning in English, especially in social and natural science. They also lack certain

household vocabulary: D1 (10;8): "¿*Cómo se dice* apron?" (How do you say). Also, colloquial expressions: D1 (10;6): "¿*Cómo se dice* I bet you anything that…'?" (How do you say). However, there are also words they need in English, for instance, D1 (10;7) when writing her diary: "How do you say *inapropiado* in English?" (inappropriate).

They are both biliterate, their reading being more encouraged and practised at home than their writing, which happens mainly at school and is, so far, their weakest skill in terms of spelling. Once, we corrected D1, who had misspelt a word and D2 (7) wisely said: "It's 'cos we're learning, and you can't know everything". In terms of reading, they learnt first in Spanish and then in English, following advice from parents had already gone through the experience in a bilingual playgroup we belonged to when the girls were younger. They both read in both languages, without showing a clear preference for either language, mostly depending on which book they are reading. They have been also writing diaries in English and in Spanish as well as messages and captions in both languages, even stories in English at home:

> M: "I love our stories together."
> D2 (6;11): "*Cuando están en inglés, mejor*." (Better when they're in English).

As for the differences in language acquisition between our children, at the moment we feel they are only due to the age gap between them, especially in English. Generally, D1's level is higher than D2's, yet, according to my notes, D2 does not seem to be doing very differently from D1 at her age. Before they started school, both our daughters received a lot of input in English, mainly from me as their main carer, but also from their father, playgroups, other bilingual families and our relatives in England. Naturally, D2, being the second child, might have received less input from us exclusively, as we had to share it between the two children, then, logically, when the girls started to spend more time interacting together as they grew up, the amount of input in the minority language they received from us diminished significantly (Barron-Hauwaert, 2011).

Neither of them has any problems to switch from one language to the other and when subtly asked about their language preferences, D1 (10;6) quickly stated "Spanish with my friends and English with my family

(us four)" and D2 (8) seconded her idea: "English here (at home), with you. It's more 'us'". Thus, both responses reflect our idea of establishing English as the family language. Regarding code-mixing, a practice that only accomplished bilingual people are able to do successfully (Schwartz & Verschik, 2013b), we all do it sometimes when we are together, but never in a monolingual context. Nevertheless, we try not to mix as my husband and I have always thought it might weaken our competence in our languages. Sometimes, when the girls cannot find the words in one language, they attempt a translation:

> D1 (10;9): "*Lo puedes decir otra vez*" (literal translation of "You can say that again")
> M: "*Quieres decir* 'You can say that again'? *Se dice* '*Y que lo digas"*". (You mean…You say…)
> D1 (smiling): "*Eso*" (that's it).

During their early years, naturally, both our children went through some periods of language mixing, as shown in section 4., a normal sign of bilingual children's linguistic development (Goodz, 1989). However, there are some examples of cross-linguistic influence from English in their Spanish which seem to be fossilized and are used by both of them even though they know they are not correct: "*mis pijamas*" (from "my pyjamas" instead of "*mi pijama*", singular in Spanish), *"hacer los dientes"* ("do your teeth" in English but "wash the teeth" in Spanish, "*lavarse los dientes*"), "*carta*" (from "card", instead of "*tarjeta*") and the blend "*wrapar*" (from "wrap" with a Spanish ending for verbs, instead of "*envolver*"). These examples are proof of the dominance of English in their household vocabulary. On the other hand, the influence of Spanish makes indirect questions in English difficult for them at the moment (11;6 & 9).

Regarding our prediction of the girls' progress in their minority language, we know we need to continue providing them with enough input in English to help them improve, trying to increase the use of the facilitating techniques we have adopted so far, encouraging them to improve their written skill and remembering that a more creative, playful approach always works more effectively. What we cannot know are the effects that our efforts will have in the future, during their adolescence next (Barron-Hauwaert 2004: 66-68) and for the rest of their lives. Surely, we will have to face new challenges regarding their bilingualism. Furthermore, my

husband and I can feel that they will not achieve a better command of English unless they live in an English-speaking country in the future, simply because they do not have the exposure they should have to the language or the need to use it regularly, which are two main elements required to develop their minority language.

6. The Children's Bilingual Identity

Since we have always regarded bilingualism in our family as a natural result of the two of us being from two different countries, both our children admit to feeling *half Spanish, half English*, not Madrilian, according to D2, who recently (9) wrote "Origin: bilingual" in her diary. In England, though, she feels more English as she proudly commented on once we were there when she was given a sticker in English amongst a selection of other languages, including Spanish: D2 (7): "*Como soy inglesa, me han dado esta pegatina*" (As I'm English, they've given me this sticker). At sport events they always support both countries equally although once, having to choose between being England or Spain to play a game, their names were decisive:

> D1 (9): "I'm England because I'm more English."
> M: "Are you? Why is that?"
> D1: "Because I have an English name and my sister has a Spanish name."

We doubt their names could influence their identity since when in England, they pronounce each other's names in a more English way, which could be interpreted as their more English selves being activated. At 10;6 & 8, I casually asked them if they feel like different people when speaking Spanish or English and they both answered negatively: "No, we're the same!"

They are proud of being bilingual as they consider their bilingualism as a natural way to be linked to both parts of their family (Pearson, 2008) and not as exceptional, knowing many other bilingual children. They both appreciate the advantages of being bilingual, as we have pointed them out many times: D2 (6;5): "*Rasi es bilingüe como nosotras, porque habla con los profes y ellos hablan inglés y español. ¡Qué morro, ¿no?!*" (Rasi -the class pet- is bilingual like us because he speaks with the teachers and they

speak English and Spanish. He's so lucky!). Another time, at the cinema in England, I spoke to a girl in Spanish so D2 (7) very logically observed: "She must be bilingual, otherwise she wouldn't have understood the film."

Both my husband and I consider ourselves good examples of bilingual people for the girls, which, according to Noguchi (1996), is the best contribution parents can offer their bilingual children. They know we can both speak both languages and they have grown up listening to me talking in English and Spanish to them, yet, interestingly, they have never asked me why I do it. They probably consider bilingualism is a natural part of our lives, which is the message we have always intended to convey.

7. Conclusions

The main aim of this article was to provide an example of a family raising children bilingually by choice from birth. As shown with this case study, my family, like other bilingual families, has gone through different stages of finding information, choosing a family language policy and adapting it, both consciously and subconsciously, obtaining successful as well as unsuccessful results. Providing them with more input in the minority language for the first 2-3 years of their life gave them a good basis for its development later. However, not finding out the right information about different elements of FLP in time and being guided by misconceptions made us miss the chance to establish a better language pattern between, at least, the children and their father. Consequently, so far, Spanish is their strong language and we need to carry on supporting the development of their English.

Hopefully my family's example will be useful to both parents and researchers studying family bilingualism, bearing in mind that the conclusions reached here cannot be generalised as each family is different and there are many factors which might influence the process of parents raising bilingual children. For instance, being able to spend time with relatives in an English-speaking country regularly is not within every family's reach. I believe, however, that my family shares some traits with others within the large group of English-Spanish bilingual families following a similar bilingual family language policy in Madrid (Ruiz Martín, 2017).

This case study also shows how the combination of theoretical and experiential knowledge can be effective to carry out a FLP successfully, which was the second aim of this article.

My third aim was to stress the importance of parents learning about family bilingualism since, as illustrated by my family's example, children might not become bilingual just by having parents speaking to them in two languages (Pearson, 2007). Even children who naturally speak to each parent in a different language must also learn to read and write in both languages and becoming biliterate does involve some effort both from the children and the parents. Parents should, therefore, be aware of their role and learn about the bilingual process to try to secure a balanced development of both languages provide enough input and create the need for them to use both languages. Following Grosjean (2009: 3), "The need factor is crucial; without it, a child may simply not acquire a language. But other factors such as the amount and type of input, the role of the family, the role of the school and the community, and attitudes towards the language, the culture, and bilingualism are also critical."

It is essential that parents should learn about the different elements of the family language policy, especially the most relevant ones: the importance of the children's early years to establish a language pattern by creating a need and using certain discourse strategies; the variety of bilingual family language strategies available other than OPOL, even if still widely recommended as observed in blogs, webs and bilingual families around us; how children make their own pragmatic decisions according to their own interpretation of their parents' strategies and the great amount of input in their minority language children must receive as well as the opportunities to use that language to develop it properly. However, making families aware of needing information might be hard to achieve, given the common misconception that children are able to become bilingual without much help in a monolingual context.

Personally, reading about the subject also reassured me that the language strategies and facilitating techniques we were using were appropriate and gave us more ideas to support our children's bilingual journey. In fact, as a parent, gaining knowledge on family bilingualism allowed me to reflect on the experience of bringing up bilingual children in a more informed way, analyse decisions and results, and try and test

different actions to help our daughters. I am now aware that it is also essential to keep an open mind about the process and reflect on it as changes are likely to occur and parents need to be able to adapt to the different circumstances (Kopeliovich, 2013).

With regards to ideas for further research, other case studies similar to this one, using ethnographic methods, might help to understand the subject better and generate new research questions, different from the ones outlined here, connected to the bilingual FLP: The role of emotions, siblings, language and discourse strategies, facilitating techniques such as reading to children and visiting minority language countries to accelerate and solidify their minority language. Another aspect of interest might be to find out how information is made accessible (or not) to parents through academic and non-academic blogs and webs and to analyse how reliable the information is.

Concerning the limitations of the study, as stated in section 2, I am aware that my personal involvement might impair the objectivity needed in research, yet it is precisely thanks to my personal experience that I have been able to understand and apply the literature on the topic to analyse our daughters' bilingual process. Regarding validity, I trust that this article meets all the requirements of a personal narrative: A contribution to the understanding of the subject, shaped in a sufficiently complex way, subjective as well as objective, an emotional and intellectual contribution and an honest account of the experience. This is the intended result of using writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000). The use of ethnographic techniques has the aim of providing real examples so that the readers can benefit from them and use them to improve their own experiences. Therefore, this study can be judged not only by its accuracy, but also by its usefulness, especially if both parents and researchers find it believable, engaging and useful and they gain knowledge on the subject (Ellis, 2004). Furthermore, the fact that the author is also the parent should not affect her credibility as parents are regarded as good judges of their children's bilingualism (Gutiérrez-Clellen & Kreitzer, 2003).

In conclusion, regarding the analysis of my family's bilingual process, I consider our family to be progressing towards a *harmonious bilingual development* (De Houwer, 2013). Although slightly frustrated in

early childhood, due to our bilingual interaction with our children, communication always happened. Currently, we have mostly monolingual interactions with them, and our daughters have an active use of both their languages, albeit not an equal proficiency in each one. Overall, however, I consider that each one of us is experiencing harmony in this process, as our family's well-being has always been our priority.

Notes

[1] https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/life-bilingual and https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/life-bilingual/201801/life-bilingual-ii

[2] https://sites.google.com/site/cambiling/

[3] http://www.bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk/

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